



Bob Hale Recalls His Arrival in Duxbury

(This is the 2nd part of a lecture given by Bob Hale entitled "Way Back Then: Coming to Duxbury in 1950." Farther down Standish St. in what is now a chiropractor's office was the Christian Science Reading Room and a little barber shop (or was it shoe repair?) in its own building, and then a dry goods store. Across the street was Freeman's Variety Store which is now Starboard Hair Design.

Ducky and Katherine Freeman were the local odd couple. He looked as if he couldn't see very well, and I don't think he could, but he wasn't as blind as the kids who tried to steal phonograph records from him thought he was. He'd creep and ooze around, and just as they were ready to run out the door with stolen goods, he'd grab them, scare them to death and let them go.

There were 2 movie theaters in Plymouth at that time and one at Brant Rock. All 3 sent out cards listing the films they were showing with times etc. Just inside Freeman's door was a telephone booth. The Freeman's tacked the movie listing card on the side of the booth. While they'd grump about it, you could call that pay telephone, Katherine would answer and you could ask her what was playing, what time does it start, etc., and she'd tell you. If Ducky answered, he'd say, "This isn't a ticket agency" and hang up.

Movie times could get complicated because if it was a first run film, they'd show it at both the downtown theater and the North Plymouth theaters, running the reels back and forth between the 2 theaters, so you had to make sure which theater Katherine was giving you the time for. If you said, "No Katherine, are you positive it's 7 o'clock downtown and 8 o'clock at North Plymouth" she'd lose her temper and say, "I suppose you also expect me to go see it for you."

If I overslept on a Sunday morning and didn't get over to pick up my *NY Times* before Freeman's closed at noon, Ducky and Katherine would drop it off at the foot of my stairs on their way home. Nice, nice people. They lived on Depot St. with a miniature cement version of the Statue of Liberty in their yard. I think only the bottom half of Lady Liberty is still there.

Next to Freeman's Variety store in the house where American Eagle Appraisal is now was Louis Gallarani's Barbershop. This building was owned by the Myrick sisters, retired telephone operators who knew everything that was going on in town, almost before it happened. One of them—Gertrude I think—would stand by the picket fence that went around the yard that's no longer there and hail passersby with, "I just heard so and so died—wasn't sick long was he?" or "Didja hear about???"—some other such newsy item. She was a permanent and beloved fixture.

On the other side of Bay Rd. in the brick building was Jack Kent's marine supply store, Mr. Shiff's store and one of 2 Cushing garages and gas stations. The other Cushing facility was where Dunkin Doughnuts is now. Eddie Hobart ran the gas station part of Cushing's Bay Motors which was in the brick building. I had purchased from Betty Burns an ancient wooden bodied Plymouth station wagon with an exhaust pipe that went right straight up at the back and puffed like a steam engine—when it was running. Because he knew it would never start on especially cold mornings, Eddie Hobart, without being called, would run over and jump start it for me. The key was always in it because I couldn't get it out.

Time for another aside—years after Eddie started my car

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for me, Lyddy and I were married and our oldest son, Rob Almy, was at Deerfield where he played sports better than he studied. While getting gas at Cushings one day I was lecturing Rob saying if he didn't work

money, he said to Rob, "Where are you going to school?" Rob said, "Deerfield." Eddie smiled and said, "I went to Deerfield."

Behind the brick building, heading down Bay Rd. on your right, was White's Dairy Bar which never seemed to make it no mater who ran it. Over the years Mr. Shiff and I spent lots of hours sitting at the high counter sipping ice cream sodas and talking about whatever came into our minds. This was after he'd retired and was living on Chestnut St. Sometimes, we'd just get back to his house, be comfortably seated in lawn chairs, and he'd say, "What do you think, is it time for an ice cream soda?" Retirement frustrated him.

Where the Exxon station is now was Clara's Coffee Shop, a little white cap perched up on a knoll, where you could get the best breakfasts and lunches anywhere—all cooked by herself. Muffins are ubiquitous now, but Clara Redmond made her own from scratch—none of this buying a ready made mix which is what most gourmet shops do. Mornings, Clara's would be so crowded all the windows would steam up. Lunches were more sedate—she specialized in glorious salads, lobster or crabmeat or chicken with popovers.

The other best place to eat in Duxbury was Mary Hackett's (now Sun Tavern). Again, it was all home cooking, not fancy but fabulous.

Before the post office moved to Snug Harbor, when it was still next to Bosun's Locker, there were other stores in that area—most important Paul "Pete" Peterson's Drugstore which is now an antique store, and Mattakeesett Hall. Farther on, around the flag pole up St. George St. was Duxbury's civic center. The high school and library were there (Green School was still operating at the corner of Western Way), as was the police station where the pool is. Town Hall was across the street.

The only business I remember in Tinker Town was Carl Johnson's flower shop—the only one in town then I think.

Snug Harbor and South Duxbury were the 2 villages I knew best. I would occasionally go to Goodriches in Millbrook or to get an extra fancy cut of meat from LaFleurs—there was an ongoing competition in the minds of many between the meat at LaFleurs and the meat at Sweetsers.

A man named Louis was the meatcutter at Sweetsers. He was cheerful, outgoing, handsome in a swarthy kind of way—and the apple of many a middle aged matron's eye. I am convinced Louis did NOT have all the affairs with Duxbury wives he was credited with having. I do know he dressed well because of all the cashmere sweaters and Harris tweed jackets various ladies bought for him from the Studio's very expensive men's shop. And I did hear a couple of Powder Point neighbors spatting on the sideway outside Sweetsers over which one had given him the particular navy blue cashmere sweater he was wearing that day. No names!

Island Creek was Bennett's, Miramar and the Loring's. One of the nicest things about Bennetts is that it gets spiffed up every once in awhile, but its character

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remains intact. There isn't any post office in the corner any more, and the deli counter expands, but the atmosphere in 1997 is very much as it was in 1950—friendly, convivial—sure to have what you want, or if they don't, something close. The current owner is an eager to please as the Bennetts always were.

Not really Island Creek, but close, beyond the route 3 overpass, down at the corner where a new CVS is being built was a tiny shack with a hinged flap front that opened up. It was Tassy's. No where ever—before or since—could you get better fried clams or better lobster rolls. That's all they served—didn't have room for any more. Only 2 guys could squeeze inside the shack behind the counter, customers stood outside under the flaps. Lines of people waited for buckets of clams and/or lobster rolls from the first warm day in spring until the last coolish day in fall. Then they enlarged the shack, again and again, until they built a fancy restaurant with a bar, big fireplace, etc.—and those great clams were a memory.

Back to Island Creek...

Duxbury Playhouse, which became the Plymouth Rock Center of Music & Drama run by Blair and Barbara McCloskey when the Playhouse folded, was actually part of Island Creek, as was The Red Jacket Inn across the corner, and Miramar across the road and up the hill. Miramar was a busy seminary then with young priests studying hard and staying clear of Duxbury.

Behind Miramar—I wonder if it is still there—was an underground grotto out beyond beautiful and extensive gardens. We went over there at night after a performance. It was eerie but enchanting with flickering candles throwing shadows on the walls and ceiling of the cave like room. I must have gone there several dozen times during those years—only at night—and never saw anyone from Miramar. They must have trusted a divine power to protect this worshipful spot they had created.

The most important personage in Island Creek—after the departure of the Cardinal who use Miramar as a private retreat—was Ann (Mrs. Atherton) Loring. I don't know whether I had the look of a lost waif, or perhaps it was my genuine interest in the people I was meeting, but a number of Duxbury families opened their arms to me, as did Ann and At Loring. When Ann died few years ago, the minister announced at her service, "In case you are wondering why we're doing what we're doing, we are doing exactly what Ann Loring told us to do." Ann was the last of a breed of wonderful women who were allowed to lead—some said dominate—all who came within their ken, because they were convinced they knew what was best—and usually they did.

Lyddy doesn't like this next anecdote, but I tell it for a reason. When she and I were unexpectedly married we upset lots of people in Duxbury. Part of it was because Lyddy was social register—I was not—and while it was perfectly okay to socialize with me, for some people it was beyond the pale that Lyddy should marry me. In the midst of all the brouhaha, Ann Loring called and said to me, "Everybody in Duxbury is wondering why Lyddy Lund would marry Bob Hale. 'I've known Lydia her entire life, and I wonder why you would marry her!' No wonder Lyddy doesn't like the story, but the fact is, Ann

had chosen a bride for me. When I married Lyddy, I was spoiling Ann's plans. Fortunately she forgave me.

The Loring's scooped me up as if I were a lost cousin, including me in all kinds of wonderful activities. Their house—the house David and Becky Wells have just sold—was the scene of endless entertainment year round. During the winter, Ann, At and I went into Boston regularly for theater and concerts, and each trip, because of At's knack for picking up people, was an adventure.

Another family that made me feel as if I were a son of the house was the Shiff family. Mr. Shiff had been smuggled out of Russia in a hay rack when he was 12 years old. From a port on the Baltic, he made his way to Liverpool and boarded a ship for New York, from which he took a train to Boston, all at age 12! There he worked at an assortment of jobs until he earned enough money to go off on his own as a peddler, walking from town to town on the South Shore selling whatever he could carry in his pack.

When he came to Duxbury he knew this was the place he wanted to live. He began summering here, staying with his wife and children at Farrell's boarding house. In 1917, he opened his first store—on Washington St. opposite Paul Peterson's drugstore. For many years she had a store at Halls Corner and another in the Blue Fish River area.

From the time we met, during my first few minutes in Duxbury, until he died 6 or 7 years later, we talked endlessly about philosophy, politics, literature—"You really should read Pushkin," he kept telling me. He, his daughter Helen and son Richard, became my surrogate family. I learned much from them.

I had a very different relationship with Richard and Fanny Field—Joan Field's parents. Richard had been a professor at Princeton and was a friend of Einstein. Dr. Field worked hard at being outrageous—and succeeded. He rode a bicycle—badly—falling off frequently and hurting himself when he spied an attractive woman he couldn't resist making a courtly gesture to. His bald head always sported at least one Band-Aid.

Fanny was even as an old woman more beautiful than any Richard made eyes at. She was serene, with a quiet dignity and graceful in very way.

One 4th of July Richard came upon 6 of us from the Gershwin Theatre about to have a pre-parade picnic on the beach. He was thunderstruck when he saw us unwrapping sandwiches. "You can't eat sandwiches on the 4th of July," he bellowed. "On the 4th of July you eat salmon and fresh garden peas. Come home with me this instant." We dutifully put our sandwiches back in the basket and followed him.

He trotted into his house calling out, "Fanny, look who I found on the beach. I've invited them to have salmon and green peas with us." Without a quiver, Fanny set the table with a quite magnificent fish service—the platter large enough to hold a porpoise. We sat down with bone handled fish knives and forks at each place, and waited expectantly, Richard with his carving knife and fork at the ready. Fanny came in from the kitchen, platter held high. When she put it down in front of Richard we could see a single can of salmon that had

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been pushed out into the middle of this vast expanse. Then she brought in a small bowl of peas.

Richard carved that 5 inch can of salmon as if it were a 30 pound fish, giving each of us tiny morsels and about 3 peas. It was all done with great seriousness and no embarrassment, a Chaplinesque scene in which we all played parts.

When several of us dropped in on Richard's birthday to wish him well, he insisted we had to go to the Winsor House to celebrate. He ran upstairs to change, thumping about in the room above the sitting room where we waited. As he clumped around little pieces of plaster flaked off the ceiling, floating onto our heads and shoulders. Fanny looked up, and said, "I keep telling Richard this ceiling is falling down, but he is always upstairs when it's happening so he doesn't believe me."

The Winsor House in those days was run like a private club—especially the pub. Dan and Marie Winsor would at their best never win a charm contest. If you weren't a regular and you dare enter the pub during regular hours, chances are they'd ignore you as if you were invisible. Which was the case the night we went there to celebrate Dr. Field's birthday. Calls for service went unanswered. Demands for drinks were unheard—until Richard climbed up onto one of the tables to proclaim it was his 70 something birthday—and the best way to mark it would be to torch "this den of iniquity, this blot on Duxbury's landscape." That caught Dan's and Marie's attention, but we didn't get drinks, we got thrown out. One of my proudest achievements was being thrown out of the Winsor House. At last I'd been noticed.

One more fey Fanny story. She slept on a day bed in what had been the library of the house. There were lots of shelves, but too many books—they were stacked on the floor almost to the ceiling. When it was decided to refurbish the library several of us offered to carry the books out. Fanny sat watching us, and as we cleared the far end of the room, in front of an obvious chimney piece, Fanny let out a deep sigh. "Oh there is a fireplace in this room. I was sure I remembered one from when I was a little girl."

The house had been in her family, the Seymours, all of them in the theatre. Fanny Davenport, who built the big house across the street, was her aunt, Harry Davenport, who was in hundreds of movies, was her uncle.

Equally theatrical—though she was the daughter of an Anglican Bishop—was Franny Barker, wonderfully gay and giddy Franny Barker. Franny had graduated from Radcliffe and kept her framed sheepskin diploma above the stove, so while she was housewifing, she could assure herself she was capable of bigger and better things.

Franny competed with Ann Loring when it came to looking after me. One Christmas when I was unable to go home to my own family, they all but pulled me apart trying to get me to spend Christmas with them. I ended up with the Barkers. Franny had a splendid dinner in the dining room. We would, she said, have dessert in the library at the other end of the house, "Bob will help me with it."

Thinking Obie and the 2 kids—Peter and Annie—had gone to the library, Franny and I went to the kitchen. She had a big plum pudding on a silver salver—with a wreath of holly around the base of the pudding. She poured what looked like half a bottle of brandy into a

sauce pan, brought it to a boil, threw it at the pudding, touched it with a match and told me to take it into the library. By the time I was halfway across the living room not only was the pudding aflame but the holly wreath was burning too—as the silver platter got hotter and hotter.

There was nobody in the library, so I turned and half ran back to the kitchen. Franny had disappeared as well. I had no choice but to dump the pudding in the sink, and go take a nap which was obviously what everybody else had done.

When I crashed my car and ended up in Jordan Hospital, Franny and George Palfrey's mother set up a schedule to alternate bringing me dinner each day after I was well enough to come home. Again there was competition, each one trying to outdo the other with lavish meals on lovely china, the whole megilla. I'll never forget Mrs. Palfrey calling up my stairs, "I'm comin' Bawb, you must be stahved." Not only was she carrying a complete meal on the tray, there was also a stemmed crystal glass which contained what was left of a martini she had poured into it.

When summer people left some of them seemed to assume Duxbury went to sleep, like Brigadoon, only to awaken toward the end of the following June. Not at all. Year-rounders breathed deep sighs of relief that the crush—nothing to match what it is all the time now—was over, and we could get back to living and playing our own games.

Boston wasn't far away, but we did lots of things to amuse ourselves. The McCloskeys, Barbara and Blair, had excellent concerts in their living room—in the house where the Montessori school is now. Olive and Ed Turner had much smaller musical evenings in their house attached to the old Studio. And Mrs. Metcalf had splendid musical events, her house was by far the largest in town then.

We also amused ourselves with wild rumors—Specks O'Keefe, famous for the Brinks robbery, was hiding out on Powder Point. Another—landscapers from Brookline were coming down and removing specimen size trees and shrubs from summer houses on the Point and on Standish Shore. We bowled at Mattakesett and at Brant Rock—where we could also go to the movies—if we didn't like what was playing in Plymouth. And we partied, not as fancy as summer parties, but at least as much fun.

Because I belonged to no particular circle, social or otherwise, I could wander freely through all of them.

One blustery day I was having a hot chocolate at the soda fountain in Monroe's drug store when Flon Blanchard asked me if I played bridge. I said I did. "We need a 4th, be at my house at 7 o'clock tonight," she said.

I went to one of the oldest houses in Duxbury, tucked back in a field behind Depot St., to play bridge with Flon, Minnie Hannigan and Beth Merrow. Each of them had to be approaching 70 and I was in my 20s, but the 4 of us played bridge once a week every winter. Years later when I was raising sheep, one of my ewes had triplets, I named them Franny Field, Franny Barker and Flon Blanchard.

The greatest buzz in Duxbury in that halcyon decade was brought about by Mrs. Omdorff's stone wall. There were wild stories having to do with the house she had Obie Barker build for her at the corner of Washington St. and Partridge Rd., but nothing compared to the uproar

over that wall. "It is just NOT Duxbury!" was the great huc and cry. And indeed it was not Duxbury then.

Looking back I realize the storybook Cape, not antique but a reproduction with perfect geraniums in perfect pots in straight lines on the terrace and matching shutters closer to shocking pink than anything that had been seen in Duxbury before—and the perfect plumb line cut stone wall—was the first step, taken almost 50 years ago, toward what much of Duxbury has become today. Rumor had it that Mrs. Omdorff had actually hired Paines Furniture to decorate the house.

Nobody in Duxbury had their house decorated. As with Boston women's hats and Duxbury men's tennis shoes, Duxbury people had their homes, year-round or summer, filled with things that had come down through generations. There was no need for somebody to decorate. It was too much.

About a year before she died I had a long talk with Mrs. Omdorff about Duxbury, hoping I could persuade her to be even more generous than she had already been to the Historical Society. She didn't exactly say no, but she led me to think she had never felt heartily accepted in Duxbury whereas Hingham had been very good to her—and Hingham did much better than we in the end. An interesting aside, in her Hingham house, Mrs. Omdorff stuck much closer to the historical she knew well and felt strongly about.

That day she and I had our talk, after she had implied Duxbury hadn't welcomed her, it was on the tip of my tongue to say, "It was the wall." Ronald Reagan would have said to her, "Mrs. Omdorff, TEAR DOWN THAT WALL!!"

It wasn't just the wall that would change Duxbury from pretty quiet little town by the sea, where you could see men dozing on the lawn of the Old Sailors Home or gazing out across the water. It was more than a wall that began the tinkering with Duxbury's glorious architectural heritage, it was route 3 that transformed the sleepy town of several villages into an upscale suburb with an increasing flair for ostentation.

But Duxbury is still here, different from the 50s, but as special now as it was then.

I have purposely not talked about Margaret Metcalf because I have talked about her so much already. Obviously she and Westwinds, the bookshop she created, had a greater impact on me than anybody or anything else. Because of her I became a bookman, because of her so many things.

But I do want to conclude and it is about time, with a poem Mrs. Metcalf wrote which expresses, I think, something about the soul—the spirit of a place, as well as of a person. Think of Duxbury as it was, as it is, and as it will be while I read Margaret Metcalf's "Lux Aeterna Luceat."

What is it You within the Self
Where does it have its mystic birth?
The You not known nor seen apart
That seeks and finds release on Earth,
The sentient Earth at one with Light,
Creator, Lover, Source of all,
The light that moves both Stars and Sea
And cares not if the sparrows fall,
The You, the Self that matters not,
Recurring waves, receding tides
Engulf the last identity
Once You - for light alone abides.